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ABSTRACT

This series of three articles focuses on basic language skills involved in second language learning. The first deals with the importance of pronunciation. The author argues that proper pronunciation and intonation cannot be achieved without recognizing the value of repetition drills and correct speech models. The second article considers modern linguistic theory concerning vocabulary study. The final study explores the relationship of the linguistic term "structure" and the word "grammar," concluding that despite the change of terminology in teaching methods, grammar is necessary for the development of linguistic competence and is here to stay. (RL)

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Foreign Language Beacon

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Back To Basics

Pronunciation Is Level 1 Priority

ED 062 893

By Ruth Keaton

Editor's Note: This article is the first in a "Back to Basics" series planned for 1971-72. The winter **Beacon** *will feature the teaching of vocabulary. Later, structure and culture will be considered.*

The staff hopes that teachers will find this series a valuable summation of these major teaching issues, presented in the light of linguistic theory and practical approaches.

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Teaching pronunciation is a priority phase of the first-level course of foreign language study, regardless of the beginning point in the student's educational career. Within a relatively short period, the student will be exposed to all the sounds of the language, phonemic and intonational.

Accurate, Authentic Model

It is the responsibility of the teacher to provide as accurate and authentic an exposure as possible so that his students will gain listening comprehension of normal speech patterns, which will also serve as appropriate models for their own speech production.

Although we teachers shall use our oral language to model phonemes and their blends for class repetition plus modeling full sentences, we shall need to depend greatly on recorded speech by natives of the target language for extended individual practice in the laboratory or for group practice with a tape-recorder in the classroom. In this manner we offer to our students the opportunity to reach better pronunciation than our own.

We should recognize that the first models ought to be the best because students will tend to retain their early "ear" for the language and their early production efforts, which become engraved on their neurons in a way comparable to grooves cut in a phonograph record. Knowing that the process of later correction is far more difficult than that of absorbing pronunciation the right way from the start, we should feel particular obligation to provide intensive practice as well as continuing oral exercises to polish. We recognize the almost indelible effect of our efforts, the fact that we provide these nearly unerasable results which will form a pronunciation plateau reached by each student within the first year of experience with the foreign language.

Teachers generally fail to appreciate fully the role they play in mastery of pronunciation. They tend to rationalize that only people living in daily contact with the foreign language can possibly obtain native-like pronunciation.

Although the latter circumstance would undoubtedly present a more normal, less strained manner of sound absorption, we can artificially provide ample native modeling within the confines of our classroom. Our tendency is, however, to be satisfied with less acceptable pronunciation as an expediency and to limit the students to no more satisfactory efforts than our own.

Besides attention to models, we teachers must attune ourselves to student oral production. We need to supply the models an adequate number of times for all to hear the sounds precisely before we elicit repetition. We should move around the room to be able to hear individuals, not just depending on the choral work for problem identification.

As we spot poor production, we ought to pause for extra effort on the diagnosed trouble sounds before proceeding. Sometimes accuracy may be obtained by added modeling and repetition. Other times we may need to go to the extreme of phonemic discrimination and practice before reconstructing a word or phrase. Although

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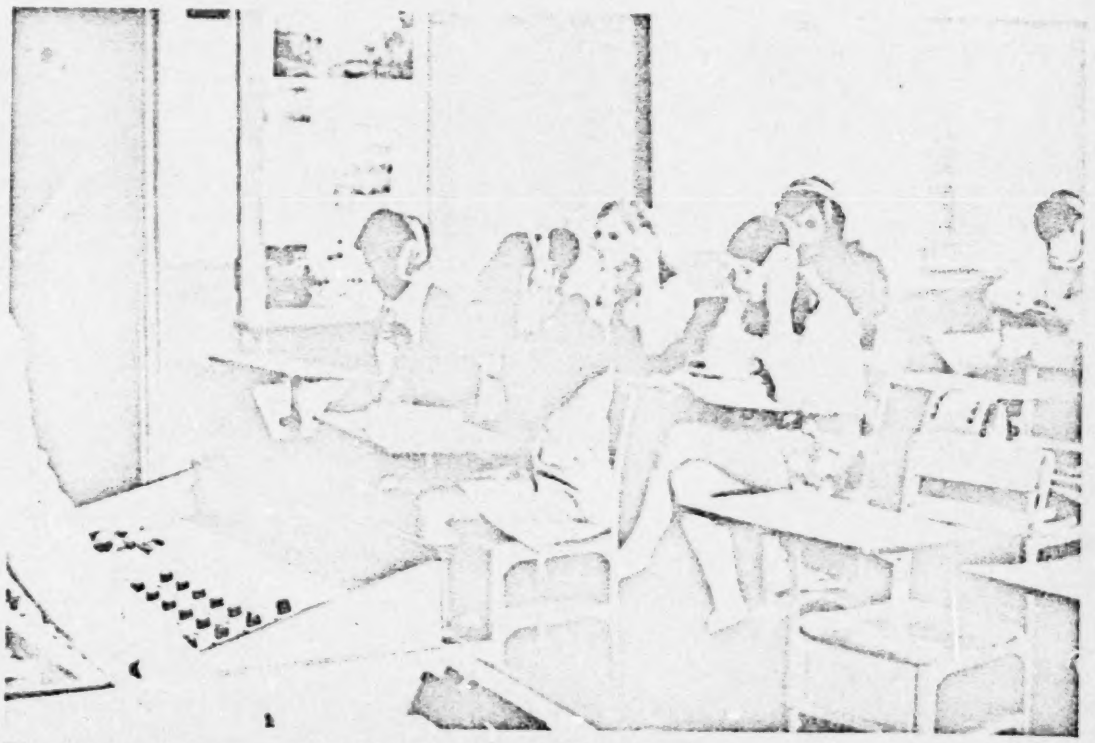

Electronic classroom facilities allow for daily individual practice of pronunciation with native-speaker models on the audio tapes.

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Pronunciation Is Level 1 Priority

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we may not conclude that brief interval with acceptable production from all, we shall have identified the desired sounds so that later practice will reinforce them, and hopefully, attain improvement. A teacher's notations of such trouble spots cue him to provide additional practice other days, to listen carefully when he monitors in the lab, and to give individual assistance as needed.

We certainly shall pay special attention to sounds not existent in the mother tongue and to intonational patterns that differ from it. We should review elements of comparative linguistics in relation to the sound systems of the mother tongue and target language in order to be alerted in advance to the likely problems our students will encounter.

Such knowledge would fortify us with the proverbial "ounce of prevention" and could increase greatly our chances of obtaining the desired results faster. The linguistic analysis of sounds would also provide us with ways of showing students the point and manner of articulation, if all other efforts fail. We would have at our fingertips simple descriptions of the sounds with approximations from the mother tongue to help students distinguish the particular sounds, knowing that each person has to hear a sound accurately before he can possibly produce it.

We teachers might well employ exercises with minimal pairs for sound discrimination. We could provide models for phonemes and blends in words and phrases, evaluating their production specifically, not just totality of sound.

Presentation In Meaningful Units

Obviously, these would first be presented in meaningful units, like the customary dialog lines. The latter would be taught in word groups. Backward build-up would be employed when sentences are long. Through such practice we would readily be able to diagnose aspects requiring extended modeling and repeating.

Dialog lines themselves are a significant vehicle for intonation. They provide the normal variety of intonational patterns and contextual meaning evoking such patterns. Learning dialogs is a foreign language teaching technique that has been grossly scorned by those who feared comprehension was lost in the vortex of memorization. The term "parrots" has been thrown into the face of audio-lingualists.

The fact that parroting has its value in the teaching of pronunciation and intonation is undeniable as long as the model "bird" is a good native speaker! Perhaps the time has come for us teachers to re-identify with the term in its proper perspective. No one has suggested that meaning could be transferred simply through repetition. Few would dare to suggest that proper pronunciation and intonation can be achieved without it!

Back To Basics

Word Study Attack Must Be Postponed

By Ruth Keaton

Editor's Note: This is the second in a "Back to Basics" series running in the 1971-72 issues of the **Beacon.** *The purpose of the series is to reconsider key aspects in the teaching of foreign languages in the light of linguistic theory and practical approaches. Featured in the fall edition was the area of pronunciation and intonation; the spring theme will be structure as a basic issue.*

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Vocabulary study within the foreign language curriculum presents a striking contrast between the current fundamental skills method and the traditional method. Teachers whose careers span the two distinct orientations can well remember the compound system of English-foreign language word lists of the traditional texts and the regular translation exercises tempting students to write word-for-word parallels in spite of warnings about contextual shades of meaning and idiomatic or grammatical variations from the mother tongue.

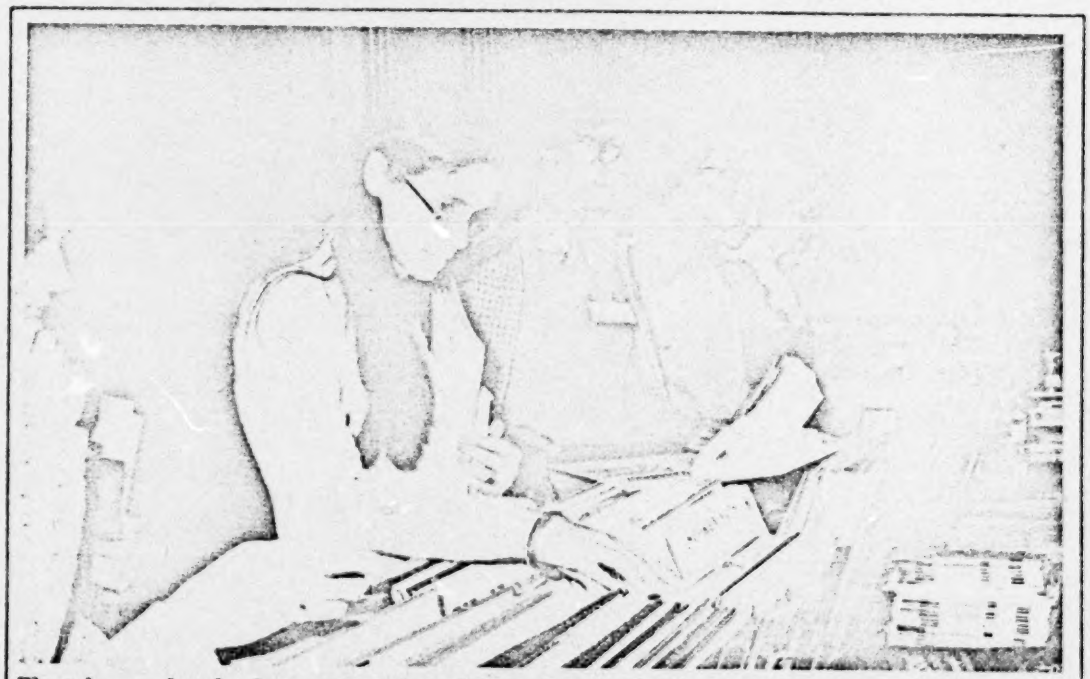
Too Much Too Fast

Perhaps even more onerous than these was the vast scope of vocabulary presentation which students were required to learn and remember without adequate time to activate much of it at all. Students tended to study the words and guess at structural implications for the goal of reading the selections in their foreign language book.

Times and techniques have changed. Learning theory as well as linguistic analysis have combined to point out better approaches to foreign language study. The resulting audio-lingual approach stresses the automaticity of structural control in priority position No. 1, relegating vocabulary expansion to later stages on the continuum.

A cardinal rule is that vocabulary is learned in context, not as isolated words. This safely identifies meaning as relevant to other phrase or sentence elements; it cuts down, if not eliminating completely, the tendency to let one word match a need when the linguistic circumstances might call for another. (An example in Spanish is *tiempo* for *time* when *vez* or *hora* or *temporada* might be required.)

Today's teacher will concentrate in the early stages on the learning of useful vocabulary in dialogs and simple readings until students show reasonable command of the language structures. He will help his students develop a basic active vocabulary through actual use of the words in model sentences, in recombined material, and in controlled selection.



Teachers check the materials exhibited at the Southern Conference on Language Teaching to find new ideas for class presentations on different levels.

Although he may broaden the scope in Levels II and III to acquaint the students with more variety and to begin the accumulation of passive vocabulary, he does not press the issue because a solid structural foundation is his principal objective. Until he knows that this plateau is achieved (a level of competent language manipulation which will never be lost even though it may fade somewhat when not reinforced), the teacher will hold back on the urge to confront his class with masses of new words. Even when the appropriate time arrives for significant vocabulary expansion, this will be handled through reading context, not through lists to be memorized.

It is true that a frontal attack on vocabulary can result in the addition of innumerable words; nevertheless, "easy come, easy go" proves that such bulk will disappear from memory before it is fully registered. Passive vocabulary must also be reinforced by re-entry.

The reading problem in second and third year is directly proportionate to the teacher's misplaced emphasis on vocabulary. Development of reading comprehension does not imply words, words, words. The skill is one of employing an acquired sense of structural meaning. "The ____fellow, ____ed by the sudden ____, ____his eyes to left and right before ____ly ____ing through the ____." All those blanks representing unknown words, could be imagined

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Word Study Attack...

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with reasonable accuracy by the reader. Such intelligent guessing is exactly what one must do if he is ever to read a book in English. Of course, he probably would not encounter seven guesses needed in one sentence; however, even if he did, he would gain added clues to assist him from previous and following sentences. Using structural and contextual aids, the reader would thus move on without consulting the dictionary.

Is that comprehension adequate? Yes, it is! Teachers must provide ample opportunities for students to read with reasonable vagueness, to understand generally. If comprehension check-ups are too detailed, students will be forced to thumb the dictionary, developing a mental block before any word they do not know. This state must absolutely be avoided.

People learn to read by reading, and they gradually pick up essential words by regular meeting of them on the page. Teachers plan for growth of vocabulary by identifying important words through summary questions and discussions, thus providing re-entry. They also work on cognates and morphological changes which help students to learn various words from single roots. Students themselves formulate a pattern of categorizing words as active or passive additions because of their systematic reoccurrence.

In the advanced levels of study, vocabulary development becomes a very individualized matter. Students with less reading comprehension growth will need material scaled to slightly increasing levels of difficulty whereas those who master the skill of intelligent guessing can be tossed into the sea of cultural and/or literary selections without fear of drowning. The teacher serves as diagnostician and supplier.

Perhaps the teacher can learn most about how to teach vocabulary by considering his own personal development of an adequate English vocabulary. Above all, he needs to remember how crazy an advanced reader would fast become if he still looked up every word that puzzled him! He'd never make graduate school, for sure, and the chances are that he'd still be on Page 75 of his first book!

Back To Basics

Yes, Grammar Still Remains Fundamental

By Ruth Keaton

Editor's note: This is the third in the "Back to Basics" series, scheduled for 1971-72 coverage. Emphasis has been placed on linguistic theory for consideration of approach to the teaching of pronunciation, vocabulary, and now structure.

Reader reaction to the series is requested. Is all this just "old hat," or has it served as an impetus for teachers to re-think what they intend to be doing in the classroom? Do teachers need to survey a theoretical base occasionally, or will they "just teach," regardless of methodological considerations? Are teacher objectives as important as student objectives?

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"So grammar is no longer taught in the foreign language class, eh." No statement could be farther from the truth! Because the grammar section of the lesson is now called "structural drills," some people fail to observe that grammar is still a key part of language learning. The fact is that it is considered so important that it ranks as No. 1 priority for the first three levels of the continuum.

The term **structure** simply supplants **grammar** to highlight the modern linguistic approach. Grammar in the past has been identified as the study of sets of rules to apply to language, reminiscent of the old Latin grammar. Each language has its own structural system, which will not fit neatly into some other language's grammatical patterns; therefore, the linguist's method must be to identify the structures as they are and to deal with them directly.

The structural approach is to avoid paradigms **per se**, but to supply in their place a proliferation of oral drills to be performed, thus making the grammar active. Talk **about** language is replaced by talk **in** the language.

Linguistically, grammar is taught as a series of constructions to be learned in model sentences through extensive oral practice. The student is made aware of how these structures are composed, how they come apart, and how they as building stones can be replaced by others.

Cynthia Suárez directs her first-year Spanish students at Athens High in an object pronoun pattern drill by cuing substitutions with classroom realia.

To accomplish this aim, the teacher does not break over into English explanation. He first teaches his kernel sentence with its key structure. This is learned through repetition. Then he works with analogous variations so that structural usage can become manipulation to reflect different thoughts.

In this way he allows the students the opportunity to do some inductive reasoning, one of the major goals of education. After a brief period of practice, however, he may play it safe by pointing out the structural issue involved, to be sure that all students recognize it. Then he will continue with further drills to solidify the learning.

Some teachers prefer to present the structural problem at hand in brief summary form before initiating drills; these people tend to identify their variation as the "cognitive-code approach." Audio-lingualists choose the plan described previously, but do not become overly concerned as long as the explanation is briefly to the point and is followed by ample oral practice.

Developing Speech Habits

The main principles involved are a) not to spend so much class time talking **about** grammar that little is left for its use and b) not to equate knowing rules with ability to use them correctly without conscious thought!

If indeed language is a set of speech habits, actual practice must be extensive to produce correct habit formation. Learners must have instant control of the basic structures of the language, not mentally conjugating verbs or figuring out forms to say. The individual user of language must master a set of automatic linguistic habits, thereby allowing him to arrange his ideas into these patterns or formats which are comprehensible to his listeners. Thus his thought process is freed to consider his own views to be presented, not the structural vehicle to convey them.

Teachers who have studied linguistic

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Yes, Grammar Still ...

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analysis find that it facilitates their task. They are aware of contrasts or differences between the structural patterns of the foreign language and the mother tongue and thereby can readily select drills enabling students to form the correct language habit rather than transplant previously-learned English habits into the second-language system.

Indeed, only an alert teacher can circumvent the interference of English structures which are not always parallels with the foreign language. Even where the parallel is exact, the students may be led astray by confidently beginning to make analogies in places of conflict, thus producing Anglicized versions of the foreign language.

Linguistic analysis also aids the instructor in showing students how any language is learned in a step-by-step, building procedure. Students then can be more patient with their skill learning since they will see the possibility of immediate expanded use of structures through slot substitutions, thus far-reaching application of basic principles.

Grammar then is a vital part of the foreign language curriculum. It is **vital** because it is **actively used.** All those current oral exercises—substitution, transformation, expansion, replacement, transformation in echelon, transformation-substitution, restatement, etc.—are hardly "interesting little variations." They are the very backbone of grammatical instruction. They provide the giant step toward control of a foreign language and toward the goal of free, individual usage.

Teacher Limitations

The teacher, however, needs to perform a couple of exercises himself with regular reinforcement too!. He ought to say to himself: "I will not subject students to more than 15-minute periods of pattern drilling at a whack." And he should comply. An overdose of practice can cause boredom, resulting in loss of attention and even loss of the purpose of the drill! Switching to a second, third, or tenth type of exercise is not good enough. A totally different phase of the lesson must provide the needed rest and change of pace.

Finally, the teacher should remember to utilize his electronic equipment for practice beyond the establishment of the structure. The individualized lab work allows him to monitor performance and provide correction as needed. Why should he babble through sentences until he is tongue-tied and exhausted when a tape can supply his models correctly today, tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow!